

CURRENT PROFILE

VERNON WALTERS

America's New Troubleshooter at U.N.

He's as tough as a general, smooth as a diplomat, alert as a spy—and little wonder. He has been all three.

The style of Vernon Walters, who was sworn in on May 22 to succeed Jeane Kirkpatrick as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, shows in the stories told about him. Once, at a party in Brasília, he heard the Soviet ambassador say to a Brazilian official, in fluent Portuguese, "The trouble with Americans is that they don't emphasize language training so that they can communicate in the language of the country." Walters walked up and replied in equally fluent Russian, "And the trouble with you Russians is that you believe your own propaganda."

The new U.N. Ambassador will seldom have to rely on the earphones that provide simultaneous translations. Walters is fluent in French, Spanish, Russian and English—four of the five official U.N. languages—plus German, Italian, Portuguese and Dutch.

Now 68, and a lifelong bachelor who immerses himself in work, the 6-foot-3 man of intrigue has been at the center of critical events since World War II.

When Rome was liberated, Walters was there as aide-de-camp to Gen. Mark Clark. When an insubordinate Gen. Douglas MacArthur was dressed down by Harry Truman, he was at the President's side as military attaché. When a mob threw stones at Vice President Richard Nixon in Venezuela, he was there as Nixon's interpreter and his mouth was cut. When President Dwight Eisenhower went to summit meetings, he was there as a trusted aide.

Paris intrigue. It was Walters who arranged Henry Kissinger's secret talks with Hanoi officials seeking an end to the Vietnam War. He got Kissinger into Paris 15 times without attracting the notice of French police, customs or immigration. "I regard that," he says, "as one of the major achievements of my life."

Another was to put one crimp in the Watergate cover-up. When President Nixon's aides ordered Walters—the

ving as deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency—to falsely inform the Federal Bureau of Investigation that its probe of Watergate would disclose CIA operations, he blocked the ploy by threatening to resign.

Walters's path to power has been uphill, with many turnings. Born in New York, the son of an immigrant British insurance salesman left school at age 16. He entered the Army in 1941 as a private, and, at retirement 35 years later, he was a lieutenant general even though he had never led so much as a platoon in combat.

After writing his memoirs, *Silent Missions*, Walters was made ambassador-at-large by Ronald Reagan—the fifth President he has served. He visited 100 countries on troubleshooting chores, averaging 10,000 miles a week.

Field of fire. At the U.N., Walters is sure to operate in a less confrontational manner than his predecessor. Where Kirkpatrick made a frontal assault on foes, the general favors a flank attack.

This he demonstrated during his



Walters, with sister, is sworn in by Vice President Bush.

brush with Watergate, reports an old friend. Called before a Senate panel investigating the scandal, Walters expected to receive rough treatment. He sent a discreet reminder to one of the senators concerning the time when the senator and other junketeers had asked him—as military attaché in Paris—to illegally ship luxury items for them through military channels to avoid customs fees. He refused the favor.

The panel handled Walters gently; he did not bring up the incident. At the hearing's end, the senator effused, "General, the American people can sleep better tonight knowing we have a man of your caliber in government." □